
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Thursday, November 05, 2009
Press Office, 202-226-0853

Chairwoman McCarthy Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health Families and Communities, for a hearing on “Preventing Child Abuse and Improving Responses to Families in Crisis.”*

I'd like to welcome our witnesses to this hearing. Today are dealing with a very difficult and upsetting subject, abuse and neglect, which sometimes result in fatalities.

We will hear from witnesses on how to improve responses for and prevent violence and abuse in families in crisis.

Abuse, neglect and fatalities are of significant social concerns in our nation. The official number of children killed from abuse or neglect nationwide in 2007 is 1,760. In 2001, the total was 1,300.

Three-quarters of the fatalities are children are under four. As a nurse for 30 years, I have seen firsthand the risks and illnesses that can result due to abuse and neglect.

We know that children who experience abuse or neglect, and children that witness abuse have their sense of security, trust and safety shaken to the core.

Studies show that young children are more likely to be reported as victims. In fact, of all cases, the maltreatment rate for infants was twenty one percent and for children ages one to three it was 13 percent.

The majority of child victims experience neglect. In fact, more than 60 percent of the children who come to the attention of child welfare authorities are victims of neglect.

They're victims of acts of omission in terms of their care, in terms of their well being.

Sometimes these instances of neglect happen due to the simple fact that parents need assistance.

These parents are not monsters, rather they need to be connected with available services or perhaps they need help with basic parental know-how.

We know from studies that the impact of chronic, long-term neglect is devastating to the development of children.

Victims of abuse and neglect are more likely to have developmental delays, and impaired language or cognitive skills. They are more likely to be arrested for delinquency and violent criminal behavior as adults.

We also know they have poor health outcomes as adults.

Over thirty-five years ago Congress enacted the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act -- or "CAPTA"-- with a very simple purpose: creating a single federal focus to deal with the front end issues associated with child abuse and neglect.

I like to think of CAPTA prevention programs as the first line of defense in the child welfare system. The CAPTA formula and competitive grants focus on the prevention of child abuse and ensuring continued well-being and safety of children.

The CAPTA programs consist of two major grant programs, as well as targeted research, data collection and dissemination and technical assistance to the states.

These grant programs provide funding for improvements to child protective services, promising prevention efforts and for community-based efforts to prevent abuse and neglect.

CAPTA provides grants to states for "technical assistance" and require states to have laws related to reporting child abuse, investigation procedures and procedures and resources for working with affected families.

In order to receive funds, States must meet a minimal definition of child abuse and neglect.

While CAPTA has brought much needed attention and change to the issues of child maltreatment, this number remains too high.

The rates of physical abuse have decreased in recent years, but the rates of neglect have remained disturbingly constant.

And we know that difficult financial times can certainly aggravate violence and victims with fewer personal resources become increasingly vulnerable.

For example, since the economic crisis began, it has been reported that three out of four domestic violence shelters have reported an increase in women seeking assistance from abuse.

That means we have more work to do, which is why I am holding this hearing today. Thank you all for being here and I look forward to the testimony.